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Understanding emerging issues will help deliver your project without breaking the bank

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Although credit markets may be thawing for real estate developers throughout New England, post-recessionary lenders have become far more wary of project economics as they seek to identify new investment opportunities. To respond to this increased scrutiny, developers must be increasingly attentive to a project's economic viability not only before the groundbreaking, but throughout the entire development process.

As a leading regional environmental engineering firm, we are all too often approached by potential clients who have "measured once" by hiring a less qualified consultant, and now must "cut twice" by retaining our services to get the job done right. Given lingering economic uncertainty and increasing pressure on developers from financiers to deliver projects on-time and on-budget, the following trends in environmental engineering will help you meet these goals. From new technologies to new regulations, understanding these emerging issues will help you deliver your development project - or maintain your existing facility - without breaking the bank.

New Mass DEP/EPA Regulations

Two sets of regulations from the Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) and the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) are scheduled to come online before year's end, and both programs could hit property owners and developers with unexpected costs in the form of fines and retrofit fees.

DEP's new Stormwater Management Standards (SMS) will affect property owners with more than five acres of impervious surfaces on-site. Owners of these sites must create and implement a comprehensive Stormwater Management Plan focused on increasing recharge, encouraging greater use of low-impact development techniques and improving the operation and maintenance of stormwater best management practices. Simply put, this new program seeks to reduce contaminated stormwater discharge in the Commonwealth's surface and ground waters.

Meanwhile, the EPA will soon introduce a new set of Spill Prevention, Control and Countermeasure (SPCC) regulations to limit the discharge of stored oil and other hazardous materials into Massachusetts navigable waters. The SPCC rule will require facility owners and developers with above ground storage tanks of more than 1,320 gallons, or underground storage tanks of more than 42,000 gallons, to implement a formal SPCC plan. The plan must include a variety of precautionary measures, including the designation of a secondary containment area to control discharged materials and a formal process to inform local authorities of a potential spill.

Norfolk Ram recently introduced new audit programs to help our clients determine if they are compliant with these regulatory requirements. A team of engineers will visit your facility and conduct a comprehensive review of its SMS and SPCC impacts. We then provide a detailed list of recommendations to help you respond to the regulations. We are also available to implement these

projects on your behalf.

Geothermal Heating/Cooling Systems

Geothermal heating and cooling technology continues to be one of the fastest growing alternative energy sectors in the country in 2010, due in part to public incentives that support sustainable energy installations. In New England, we are seeing rapid growth in geothermal through our National Geothermal Division, as developers, businesses and homeowners seek to reap substantial energy costs while also promoting the cleanest, greenest alternative energy source available. In two short years National Geothermal has experienced 400 percent growth in total geothermal installations, with eight projects underway at high-profile facilities like the Portland International Jetport and the Massachusetts Maritime Academy.

Geothermal heating and cooling systems work by transferring energy to and from the earth to provide a more efficient, affordable and environmentally friendly method of heating and cooling for facilities of all shapes and sizes. Geothermal systems create no air pollution and have no negative impact on global warming. A new installation will pay for itself in about seven years while saving a facility owner approximately 65 percent annually over conventional HVAC systems. Visit www.nationalgeothermal.com to learn more about the benefits of this exciting green energy trend.

Engineers As Deal Assessment Consultants

Finally, the use of environmental engineers as deal assessment consultants is another growing trend in 2010. In the past, an engineer's role was largely limited to on-site consultation and project execution. Today however, Norfolk Ram experts are regularly called on by project proponents to meet with prospective lenders to review the viability of a redevelopment site based on the due diligence we performed on our client's behalf. Having an expert on-hand to weigh a project's feasibility by explaining potential engineering challenges in simple terms is a major benefit for the developers we work with.

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